

LOVE A
GOOD
STORY? | **HERITAGE**
STORY SKILLS
— September - December 2012 —



Evaluation Report

Intangible heritage, tangible skills:
participating in Oxford's story heritage



Project Ref: YH-11-05943



Executive Summary

Grant Award: £41,700

Project brief

A unique new museum - The Story Museum - is being created in Oxford. This Heritage Lottery funded programme was designed to develop the story heritage skills of 15 local adults as a vital next step towards helping the museum engage its diverse communities in this exciting process.

Diverse communities

The Story Museum celebrates the power of stories for all. It aims to develop a volunteer base that reflects the breadth of its local communities, and to develop ways of engaging these communities in exploring and presenting story heritage in all its forms. The project recruited 15 adults who were out of work and education. Half of the group were from areas of economic disadvantage. The group represented a range of communities as well as cultural and educational backgrounds. The participants, aged 22-63, were at very different stages of their lives and careers. Some wanted to get back to work, others to gain confidence and develop new transferable skills.

Intangible heritage

Oxford is a city of stories. It has a rich oral tradition that ranges from Norse myths to local legends, rural ballads to world tales gathered by its many cultures. Over the centuries these have fuelled an even richer literary heritage. The city lays claim to many famous authors and illustrators, of whom a surprising number – such as Lewis Carroll, C. S Lewis, J.R.R Tolkien and Philip Pullman - have created enduringly popular fantasy literature for adults and children. As a result of this programme, participants heard, read and learned to retell some of these stories, researched their origins and captured oral histories from people who knew their creators.

Unique treasures

Intangible stories link to tangible treasures: the objects and places that inspired them, or were inspired by them, the diaries and letters, sketches and manuscripts, books and recordings that became part of their making. Our heritage partners The Ashmolean Museum, Pitt Rivers Museum, Museum of the History of Science, Museum of Natural History, The Bodleian Library and Westgate Library gave our 15 participants privileged and often behind-the-scenes access to some of the city's great story treasures.

Tangible skills

The programme developed participants' storytelling and heritage interpretation skills via workshops and mentoring. The group met two days per week over twelve weeks from September to December 2012. There were practical workshops to introduce oral storytelling techniques, tour guiding, and research and interpretation, with built-in time for mentoring and peer support. The groups produced learning resources from their own research. These included oral history recordings of people who

knew C. S Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien, a new Historypin virtual tour and a printed map of the city's story heritage.

Celebrating achievements

The group displayed and demonstrated their new learning resources at a Celebration Event attended by family, friends, Story Museum staff and project partners. Each participant was presented with a completion certificate by Colin Dexter, creator of *Inspector Morse*.

Benefits and impacts of the project

Individual participants gained storytelling, research and interpretation skills and knowledge about their city and its story heritage, which brought greater confidence and new aspirations. All commented on the power of stories to connect people to places and help very different individuals enjoy learning together. All 15 completed the course. As a Happy Museum we were keen to evaluate changes in well-being. All but one reported improved well-being and a stronger sense of belonging to and pride in their city. Each made different decisions about how they will use their heritage story skills in future.

The Story Museum has learned invaluable lessons about participation and interpretation which will shape future programme and design. It has developed a well-received story heritage course, elements of which can be repeated. It has built closer relationships with its heritage partners, widened its group of storytelling, literary and interpretation advisers and trainers, and forged new links with community centres and volunteer organisations (Wood Farm, Barton, Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill and Littlemore family centres and Oxford Community Voluntary Association). It has also acquired some unique audio archive and beautifully designed virtual and printed maps.

What next?

The participants want to stay involved as Story Museum champions, volunteers, story tour guides or community ambassadors. Some attend the museum's monthly storytelling group. Several have signed up to develop and deliver a story tour of the city to raise funds for the museum. Others want to engage new participants with future story heritage projects.